

Reflections on the Election of Donald Trump: Uninspired and Inspired Responses from a Social Work Faculty

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Abstract: This narrative account is a chronology of events beginning November 8, 2016 and culmination June 1, 2017 with the submission of this narrative. The events illustrate some of my own personal perspectives and responses to the election of Donald Trump to the U.S. presidency. These perspectives and responses evolved as I personally came to grips with the reality of this administration and the potential for policy initiatives negatively impacting vulnerable populations. This evolution is illustrated with the use of seven key terms associated with the six core values of the social work profession: collaborating, researching, understanding, teaching, serving, advocating, and reflecting.

Keywords: policy, vulnerable populations, social work values, collaborating, researching, understanding, teaching, serving, advocating, reflecting, integrity, relationships, social justice, competence, dignity and worth of the individual, Donald Trump

Election Night

A small Methodist church in a “Red state” hosted the voting in my precinct. An official led me to my machine, explained the controls, and backed away only slightly. He remained uncomfortably close. Was he attempting to ensure I voted the party line? Statistical data indicated that the majority of voters in my state would push buttons beside the name Donald J. Trump. Some would even say that my vote didn’t matter at all since I was voting in a state whose majority was Republican. Nonetheless, I stood proudly and cast my vote in defiance. Not that I didn’t also fit that demographic pushing buttons for Trump: 51 year old white male in a southern state. Nonetheless, the election official in my immediate periphery continued hovering, as if he were ready to cast dispersions on anyone who dared to diverge from the way of Red. Still, I didn’t like the hovering and broke the silence: “Do you mind stepping back a bit...?” He tried to reassure me that he couldn’t see my ballot screen and backed off...maybe a step. I voted, received my sticker, and exited thinking how strange that interchange with the keeper of voting machines. Little did I know that the night was about to get much stranger.

Not much leading up to this night was believable. I can still hear Governor Jeb Bush speaking about Trump in the early Republican primaries: “This is not a serious kind of candidate” (Collinson, 2015, par. 32). Evidently a lot of people differed. Somehow, candidate Trump traversed the political landscape all the way onto the ballot as a “serious candidate” for CEO of the free world. That was a story, but the bigger story was the glass ceiling soon to be shattered. The Clinton campaign staffers, buoyed by recent polls, built a reception stage with a non-metaphorical glass ceiling, symbolizing the meteoric accomplishment of a woman shattering the ceiling all the way to the presidency.

But that metaphorical breakage would have to wait. Election night 2016 was off and running. I

was in the “cave” where I had watched many epic battles before, particularly classic sports battles. My beloved Kentucky Wildcats rode a historical wave to a perfect 38-0 season all the way to Final Four back in 2015, two wins away from a historical season and a national championship. It was in this very cave that I watched the Wisconsin Badgers steal history from those Cats. I was distraught, but the next day, life went on. Not one U.S. policy was impacted and there was zero worldwide impact. But tonight’s contest was markedly different. A loss for the candidate with progressive values, in my opinion, would impact history very negatively. But, I wasn’t worried. With all the polling data and confidence in that data, I felt like November 8th was more a formality, the stamp of authenticity on what pollsters could see in their quantitative crystal balls: Clinton wins! As the night progressed, I wasn’t even concerned as Trump pulled off a couple of early surprises. I thought: ‘Ok. This night might just contain a modicum of drama.’ After all, the adrenaline rush of a closer contest resonated with this sports enthusiast.

Midway through the evening, Trump pulled off a few more surprises. So, this spectator moved forward in his seat, ready for the inevitable tide of progressivism and better judgment to prevail, ready for the serious candidate to close the deal. But as the evening grew older, Clinton momentum hadn’t yet kicked in. I inched up further toward the TV. As the “anomalies” piled up precinct after precinct, they were becoming, by definition, less like anomalies. Then, Michigan. Then, Pennsylvania. Each Trump victory delivered greater unease and downright concern. The angst hovered about me like the election official earlier in the evening, yet I couldn’t step it back this time. This was happening. My cell phone dinged a new message. “What the _____ is going on.” I remember sitting there in a surreal disbelief because I didn’t know actually “what the _____ was going on” except that Donald J. Trump was about to be elected as the 45th President of the United States.

From the political commentators, who looked surprised and subdued, it was clear that the night had all but slipped away from Clinton. Soon the political prognosticators would call it. I couldn’t hear them call it. Like a grieving loved one defying the doctor’s “call” of death, I just turned off the screen. I went to bed fantasizing that perhaps the morning would reveal a magical surprise. I do remember waking up surprised after an election night many years ago. I couldn’t watch them call that election either: I was 12 and had 6th grade the next day. But I remember the glee in my mom’s voice when she woke me for school: “We have a new president: Jimmy Carter.” I didn’t know much about politics and had not learned much more since my parents asked me if I knew about Watergate a few years earlier; I told them Watergate was the big gate they installed by the river to keep water from flooding the town. But, mom was happy with Jimmy Carter, so I was happy with Jimmy Carter. I didn’t wake up to a miracle on November 21, 2017. The morning news yielded no surprises, no Hail Mary comeback, no shards of glass mixed with confetti celebrating a punctured ceiling. Wednesday morning, that ceiling was unscathed, and Candidate Donald J. Trump became President-elect Donald J. Trump.

The Day After

A blanket of gloom stretched across Wednesday morning. I remember sensing a similar mood on November 21, 2007, when Barak H. Obama was elected 44. Back then I lived even deeper in the South, not far from sites where bombs ripped through churches and where water hoses and

police dogs were used as weapons. Fifty years after those infamous events I worked at a non-profit agency where Obama supporters were scarce; I may have been the sole Caucasian inspired by Obama. The collective mood that morning was mostly dismal. I remember one woman commiserating with another, both agreeing on the gravity of the day. It is not for me to judge how much of that gloom was related to policy and how much was related to race, but the next few years yielded many racial rants from people who could tolerate Obama's politics better than the color of his skin.

On post-election day 2016, my dismay was most certainly connected to race. I had heard Trump generalize about Mexican "criminals" and "rapists" (Hing, 2016, par. 1) and throw down the gauntlet to African Americans when he rhetorically asked for their votes: "What the hell do you have to lose?" (Egan, 2016). The Wednesday after, I was afraid we were about to find out how much we ALL could lose, especially vulnerable Americans. Wednesday was rife with the reality that entire policies could be rolled back: two steps forward and ten steps back. Yet, those of us grieving would have to move forward, as schedules and routines demanded allegiance. My Wednesday routine was The Law and Social Work at 8:00 a.m. at the university where I had taught for five years. I really had no plan for some sort of post-election speech, some dirge like word scramble to rally the troops. I couldn't really vent the way I needed. After all, of the 35 students in my classroom that morning, at least some would not be grieving at all, but would be quietly satisfied. I taught at a university in the Bible belt, in a Red state. Even so, more than the majority of the students claiming social work majors at APSU gravitated towards progressive political views while a smattering of others identified with conservative political views. In all of my classes, I tried to refrain from any dialogue or rhetoric which might alienate or unfairly generalize minority political views. So, on the morning after such a divisive election, I would need to use great care in room C-133. But the air in the room hung heavy, the students subdued. Even the talkers remained silent and the unlikely elephant in the room was hardly referenced. I said something in passing about "Your president-elect..." I was referencing something about a policy point (I could have picked one of 100) which was incongruent with social work. The class ended with little fan-fare, just a quiet class of students perhaps not ready for debriefing.

The Wait

Not all hope was absent that Wednesday, as a trump card might just be in the deck. That deck was the 75 days till the inauguration. Maybe, just maybe, one of those days would cough up a card. Perhaps some revelation, or the deep state, or some scandal would be the card that kept this man from Pennsylvania Avenue Yet, the clock was ticking. Every day hope resided in some force beyond my control. Something or someone would surely intervene to alter the unthinkable. I had to maintain hope. After all, people needed hope. Sometimes we need a miracle, even a hero. President-elect Donald J. Trump was about to step up on a platform, stand before a Supreme Court justice, and receive the reigns. I couldn't help but see another platform, one that seemed to be built on division, xenophobia, white nationalism, and ableism. I heard names like Bannon, Sessions, DeVos, Pruitt: These were the "rollback" people, rolling back policies like the retail store rolls back prices. These slashers of policy with swords of injustice were bad news to anyone committed to the ideas of social justice and equity, especially in consideration of societies' most vulnerable and marginalized. It was both shocking and unbelievable. Nothing

was off the table: educational programs for poor children, healthcare for millions, assistance paying for utilities in the dead of winter, sanctuary for those deemed illegal. so, every day I would check the news. Could it be the Russian scandal? Will they discover some sort of collusion? Will this entire platform be dismantled before it ever sets up shop? Something had to happen. Please tell me the “powers that be” are uncovering every stone in efforts to discover the scandal that surely must exist. This truly felt as if the sky was falling. Chicken Little seemed less like a fairy tale. Even though rolling back policy was my greatest concern, I couldn’t help but think about Trump having possession of nuclear codes. But...it was ALL about to happen.

Inauguration Day

The inevitable march towards Inauguration Day kept in lock step. No hero had emerged to stop Mr. Trump. No scandal. No move by the magical powers. No “cigarette smoking” character like C.G.B. Spender who, with a word, could fix anything. Evidently, Spender lived only in my dreams and in the X-Files series of the 90s (The X-Files Wiki, n.d.). From all appearances, 45 was about to be sworn in. It was a cloudy, gloomy day on Friday, January 20th in Washington, DC, with a chance of rain; even the weather seemed to understand. The crowd gathering was distinguishable from a distance as a series of red dots peppering a gathering crowd. Each red dot represented a cap resting on the head of a person who hoped, and evidently believed, that Donald J. Trump would “Make America Great Again.” The pomp and ceremony launched at 11:00 a.m.. The music was beautiful, except it sounded more like a dirge to me. The prayers were eloquent, but I honestly had to turn off the TV before Franklin Graham took the stage. His father Billy Graham had been an icon to me and my evangelical-minded family. Yet Franklin seemed to fall far from the tree, propping up a president-elect and a platform which seemed so far from core Christian teachings. Yet, no hero emerged to stop Mr. Trump. It’s not that people had not taken a stand. People had taken to the streets: Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, Nashville, etc. They filled the streets. But no one stood up who could single-handedly or even collectively stop this.

For whatever reason, I turned the TV back to the inauguration to see the actual swearing in. That surreal, sinking feeling held sway: no way Donald Trump can stand in our nation’s capital and take that oath. As he faced the monuments of our past, surely Lincoln would stand up from his stone chair at the Lincoln Memorial and shout from the stairs: “This is not what emancipation is about.” Surely Martin Luther King, Jr. would untether himself from the stone wall on Independence Avenue and we would hear that magnificent voice once again: “I still have a dream...and THIS is not it.” Yet, reality requires new voices, preferably ones still breathing. Yet no voice was enough to halt what seemed unbearable. No Hail Mary would help. No trump card fell. Just Trump. On the platform facing the historic artifacts of our nation’s past, Donald J. Trump became the 45th president of the United States of America.

The First 130 Days

I wish I could say that, once the “Regressive” era arrived, I wasted no time channeling my best Jane Addams, that I had modeled what an advocate should be doing in the first 130 days. Indeed, that might make a better narrative account and that is the story I would like to tell; but it’s not the real one. This narrative unfolds more like me looking like a deer in headlights. Many of us

who have lived or traveled in rural areas actually know what a “deer in headlights” looks like. Mesmerized by the incongruity of the lights, the deer is frozen. No amount of instinct or ability is of any assistance to this speedster of nature; instead of darting into a distant line of trees, the deer stands frozen, hypnotized, a spectator of lights. That is what the first few months of Trump’s presidency seemed to me. The incongruity of it all kind of froze me in place. My instincts to act seemed impotent, or perhaps it just seemed futile to bother. I became a citizen caught in the headlines. I think I was still waiting for some superhero, Spender, or the deep state. Like Ricky Bobby from *Talladega Nights*, I must have uttered an existential cry as desperate and as disoriented as Ricky Bobby’s plea: “Help me Jesus! Help me, Tom Cruise! Help me, Jewish God! Help me, Allah! Help me, Tom Cruise!” (“Ricky Bobby *Talladega Nights*,” n.d.).

The next few weeks and months consisted of me trying to get past the headlines and get moving again. It’s not like I didn’t have good excuses after all. I had no shortage of things to occupy more time than I had. Take faculty duties for example: My faculty duties occupied legions of time teaching, advising, and research, and giving service to the university and community. How did I have time to be an activist? I would even make a good candidate for poster-boy of the sandwich generation: parents and children living under a single roof (Parker & Patten, 2013). As a result, I think I have had good cause to be excused from the front lines in early 2017. However, even in my excuses I could not escape the call to be active in the fight against the policy slashers. Repealing The Affordable Care Act could have significant consequences for my 76-year-old father. He spent an inordinate amount of time stressing about co-pays and sparring with his insurance company. How much worse could this be after Trumpcare? Caring for and educating my boys also took me back to the Trump team. My wife and I had recently pulled one of my children from public schools because he was not receiving proper educational accommodations. If it were a battle to get schools to adhere to mandated educational accommodations before Trump, how much worse would it be with Trump? After all, Trump’s choice for education secretary had not impressed on the notion of greater accommodations. Even my excuses reminded me that things were deteriorating in “Trump’s America,” as policies were rolling back at warp speed. Yet, I continued spectating, a teacher caught in the headlines, waiting for someone else to step up.

Thankfully, people were stepping up and standing up. Protest was increasingly difficult, as measures to quell protest were proposed and protesters were ridiculed. The label that seemed to slice deepest was “snowflake.” I didn’t want to be called a snowflake. I prided myself on being a strong person, able to handle my own. I have had to unlearn the excessive parts of assertiveness thanks to a loving but honest wife who reminded me that strength is knowing when to choose battles and when to walk. Yet, I didn’t want to be called a snowflake, but I also didn’t want to be run over in traffic. They started running over protesters. They started proposing legislation, slap-on-the-wrist laws for people who ran over protesters. Trump’s America was becoming downright scary. But at some point, perhaps out of desperation, the deer finds its way free from the headlights.

Finding My Way

This narrative is about this social work professor escaping from the morass of the headlines and

eventually finding my way. At times, it was like one step forward and two steps back. The points below lay out how I found my way. These points are not laid out like stepping stones on a quiet walk, but like anchors on an upward climb, anchors not proportionally laid out for ease, but requiring stretching and reaching beyond comfort level. These seven points are collaborating, researching, teaching, understanding, practicing, advocating, and reflecting. And each one of these is related to one or more of the six social work values-importance of human relationship, social justice, integrity, competence, dignity and worth of the individual, and service (Reamer, 2006).

Finding Allies: Collaborating (Importance of Human Relationships)

Snowflakes are innocuous, frozen wafers until they join other snowflakes. The more flakes gather, the greater the impact. I survived the blizzard of '65 in Hammond, Indiana and the blizzard of '78 in Western Kentucky. But the one I remember most was the 16 inches dropped on Louisville, Kentucky in 1994. The city was immobilized and everything was canceled that wasn't related to life and death; I learned firsthand how snowflakes could change everything if they bonded. So, my first organized attempt to collaborate was with a local politician sympathetic to social work values. The quaint little Mediterranean restaurant where we met was adorned with elements of middle Eastern culture and life. It served as a reminder of our collective commitment to immersion into and welcoming of cultures other than our own. We both shared a concern that cultural diversity might not be as welcome by this new administration. I peppered this seasoned politician with one basic question: "Should we be really concerned about Trump as president?" Is the sky really falling? Is it Chicken Little Time or not? And what can we do? Mr. Sterling was concerned but measured in his responses. He wasn't resigned to some sort of doomsday scenario, but he was concerned about policy rollbacks and the potential for Trump to inadvertently start war. Yet, Mr. Sterling did not commiserate with Chicken Little, and he showed strength and confidence as he encouraged social workers to do what social workers do; be informed, be active, and be hopeful.

One of the six social work values is the importance of human relationship. Social workers find strength in those relationships as we navigate paths not unfamiliar to social workers. The roll call of social workers who have bonded is familiar, as are the accomplishments of this collective. When social workers join, they create settlement houses, help craft welfare laws, protect children from any circumstance which might limit or steal any part of their childhood. But there is much work to be done presently, and the need to unify and act is critical. Since that initial meeting in January, I have found many allies, including NASW in Tennessee and on the national level. Joining with other like-minded people creates a greater impact; there is strength in numbers. But, that strength is diluted if the quest for truth is not paramount.

Unearthing the Fake from the Real: Researching (Integrity and Competence)

The last few months has demonstrated that information does not equal truth. In the season of Trump, sorting out fact from fiction has been difficult, but integrity demands that we do the work; competence sees that it is done well. After all, social work is an evidence-based profession; we are, ostensibly, experts at sifting fact from fiction or opinion. I consider myself a

pretty decent sifter of truth, having taught research at both the bachelor's and master's level. But this past spring has reminded me that I too can be sloppy. I carelessly passed something along on social media which was misleading. After discovering my error, I quickly deleted the information, sent out a sort of arcane apology, and hoped no one noticed. Now I double check everything I pass on. It doesn't matter who created it or passed it to me; if fake news intersects me, I have a responsibility to expose it.

Sometimes fake news is enticing. Recently I thought Donald Trump had damaged himself in a *People Magazine* article before becoming president: "If I were to run for president, I would run as a Republican. They're the dumbest voters in the country. They believe anything on Fox News. I could lie and they'd still eat it up. I bet my numbers would be terrific" (LaCapria, 2017). Even though I personally do not believe that Republicans are less intelligent, I was hoping this was not "fake news." Yet, before I dared pass this information along I thought it might be good to authenticate it. It didn't take long to discover that this was indeed faux (LaCapria, 2017). It did sound like a Trumpism and possessed soundbite quality, yet no amount of social appeal can compete with the truth. Social workers must pan for facts, picking out truth nuggets from that which needs discarding in the daily feed of news and continually emerging information and misinformation. Even in the last few months I learned to diversify news sources. I watched everything I could, read everything I could, and even sought out advice from others. I started watching news sources with different ideological biases. I began consulting sites and organizations whose sole purpose was to check facts. I searched out the consumer book culture. I read both anti-Trump consumer reading and pro-Trump consumer reading.

Social workers must also demonstrate competence at a level much higher than the basics of searching out fact from fake news. We must also take opportunity to understand what really happened with this election. How did the pollsters get this one so wrong? What were people thinking in parts of the U.S. known as The Rust Belt? Is it fair to cast dispersions on someone who voted differently? Is one political party more morally upright or justified than another political party? This latter question is an area of research I myself have great interest in and one in which I have launched a study. But there are numerous outlets of research to be explored. Social workers value understanding, and seeking understanding is the next anchor on the climb.

Reaching Beyond the Battle Lines: Understanding (Dignity and Worth of the Individual)

Closely related to researching truth, social workers need to reach beyond battle lines; this requires understanding. Divisions existed in America even before the election of Donald Trump. But after the election, battle lines became fences and walls. I wondered: How does one even begin to traverse this new battlefield of values and ideas? How could I, how could we, best act to preserve policies which protected and aided vulnerable populations? It is not like I hadn't encountered this question before. In a Macro Social Work class I taught, we juxtaposed the social change models of Saul Alinsky and Martin Luther King, Jr. Alinsky (1971) laid out his plan in *Rules for Radicals* and legitimized the demonization of the opponent, while King proposed a more neutral approach of calling out injustice but recognizing the humanity in each person (King, 1964; Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2012).

By February of 2017, it seemed that everyone was more Saul Alinsky in approach. Snowflakes versus deplorables and racists. The rhetoric was ubiquitous and it was easy to be drawn into conversation streams on social media. One such stream centered conversation on the association of Trump supporters with racist views. One contributor to that stream seemed much more Alinskian: "Anyone who voted for Trump is a racist." I viewed things a bit differently: "Well, I think some people who voted for Trump are racists. And that his platform appeals to racists. But I think it is a stretch to say that everyone who voted for Trump is racist." I think we eventually agreed to disagree. But the conversation reminded me of the need to be more understanding and less generalizing.

In social work circles in which I have associated, there seems to be an assumption that good social workers are Democrats. Yet, a few of my own students identified more with conservative ideology, and one of them requested office time with me in early spring. Battle-weary from the crossfire of rhetoric, she began questioning her own calling as a social worker. I explained that the social work profession gravitates more towards progressive politics since this seems to be the most consistent pathway to help the most vulnerable. I told her that, if she could demonstrate that another approach works better, can be sustained, and reaches as many or more people, then I would be the first to support it. If the evidence demonstrated that private philanthropy is more efficient and sustainable over time, then that's the way social work should advocate. But until that is demonstrated, then the profession should continue to advocate for programs and funding that work through local, state, and federal entities to assist others.

Discerning social work practitioners and educators move beyond the rhetoric to a greater understanding. Attempting to understand why people hold particular views or vote one way over another can be challenging, but can pay off hugely. I spent Christmas day 2016 with people who voted for Trump and will likely spend Christmas 2017 with the same people. Labeling these friends as uncompassionate or racist seems to overgeneralize. On the other hand, trying to understand can be arduous and frustrating. The aforementioned friendship has spanned nearly 40 years. My friend and I disagree ideologically on political methodology, but to attribute race as the key issue in his vote for Trump would be oversimplified. We both grew up in the same small town where racial divides existed, but these divides were mitigated through school and sports. So if not race, then what? One single, overarching issue determines most of his votes: abortion. Although I can understand his desire to see less abortions in America, we differ on how to reach that goal and many others. Anti-abortion does not equate to pro-life; my friend and I have been back and forth over this on numerous occasions. Pro-life is, by definition, an oxymoron if by pro-life you demonstrate that your platform is mostly pro-birth. Indeed, social workers need to understand that one single issue can trump (no pun intended) a thousand others. For others, this election was about jobs, or health care, or draining the swamp. And for some, it was about race and nationalism, but social workers are remiss to overgeneralize by lumping everyone into simple categories.

Person-in-environment considerations involve the strenuous but necessary work of considering decisions within discreet environments (Miley, O'Melia, & DuBois, 2011). How we respond once we understand is also important. If we discount someone's moral code that led to a voting decision, then we have deepened the battle lines (assuming of course that one's moral code is

not, by definition, built on a platform of prejudice). The dignity and worth of individuals demands that we do our best to understand people; integrity is following through on the quest to understand. Yet, the quest to understand will not always result in agreement over issues. Being conciliatory does not equate to acquiescence. If Trump does something good for the country, or for historically marginalized people, I can applaud. But when he does the opposite, I will stand in the way. These are times in which we must be very discerning people. We must reach across the battle lines and find as much common ground as possible, but stand up for what we believe.

Capturing History Unfolding: Teaching (Competence)

One constant in the last few months was my trade; I taught social work students. And President Trump helped. Trump quickly became a case study in themes related to law and social work. My class just happened to be studying the U.S. Constitution and the branches of government. What more could a professor ask for than a current event which beautifully illustrated the current balance of powers? On January 27, President Trump issued an Executive Order curtailing travel for Muslims from seven different countries. On February 5, U.S. District Judge James Robart issued a restraining order halting the enactment of the order. After the U.S. Justice Department appealed the order, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals rejected an emergency stay (McGraw & Kelsey, 2017). I may not have been happy with the Trump's agenda, but I might as well take advantage of the current headlines which seemed to provide great teaching points.

Not only has the court balanced out the president's policy, but Congress has done so as well. The irony in this latter case is that the GOP controls Congress. Yet, when the time came for the president to fulfill the campaign promise of "Repealing and Replacing Obamacare," the president was faced with a divide between Republicans who supported the bill and those who opposed it. As roll call time approached in April, the president did not have the YEAS. But the dissenters, interestingly enough, dissented for two very different reasons. There were those who wanted to roll back just about every facet of The Affordable Care Act and those who wanted to tweak the law. The man who claimed to be "the closer of the deal" was struggling to close the gap between more hardline conservatives and more moderate conservatives (Pear, Kaplan, & Haberman, 2017). The lesson in this is that CEO is different from POTUS. Mr. Trump may not have had to deal with a balance of powers, but President Trump had to. Again, civic lessons in constitutional governing and the balance of powers were being served before our very eyes, custom-made for my Law and Social Work classes.

The presidency of Mr. Trump has provided teachable moments far beyond constitutional law and balance of powers. The many policy issues again at the forefront of political discussion, such as healthcare reform, welfare reform, and immigration reform provided ample opportunity for illustration and discussion. One such point of emphasis centered around alleged cuts to the popular program Meals on Wheels. When the news first broke on this story there was uncertainty as to the impact the Trump budget would have on the elderly food program (Korte, 2017). Nonetheless, it provided an interesting point of emphasis for my Research II class. I informed the class of the breaking news on the topic and I proposed a simple question: "What should be the basis of a whether or not a program is funded?" Students wasted little time regurgitating the knowledge consumed over two semesters: Programs should be statistically

assessed regarding overall efficacy for clientele, assuming efficacy is properly operationalized. The social work value of integrity demands that we continue to do in the midst of whatever life throws our way, what it is we are called to do. And teachers should keep up to date on current events so as to utilize every presentable pedagogical means available to illustrate what is being taught. That is what competent teachers do. Goodness knows that Mr. Trump provided a lot of early illustrations. But social work teachers must also remember what most essentially defines the profession.

Serving the Most Vulnerable: Practicing (Serving)

Social work is, at its essence, a practice-based profession. Those of us associated with this profession at any level have a common DNA gravitating towards changing lives through direct practice. Social workers really need no such written dogma such as the following: “Social workers pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people” (Reamer, 2006, p. 254). This is what we have always done for as long as we can remember. We were uncomfortable when an “outcast” was ridiculed during 7th grade recess. We got caught associating with the untouchables. Before we knew it, we were going out of our way to assist others in need and were choosing careers with less pay appeal and more heart appeal. And it usually had something to do with vulnerable or oppressed populations. From the elderly in retirement homes to foster kids in DHS custody, we have been there. We attempted to embody what Jewish poet Emma Lazarus envisioned through a poem inscribed at the Statue of Liberty: “Give me your tired, your poor / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free / The wretched refuse of your teeming shore / Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me / I lift my hand beside the golden door!” (Lazarus, 2002). And when we were not helping immigrants, we might just be found among the poorest of the poor in sections of town we had been warned to avoid. And, God forbid we be found among those who ridiculed or bullied the disabled. So, we collectively got a sick feeling in our stomachs when Candidate Trump appeared to mock *New York Times* Reporter Serge Kovalski (Carmon, 2016). After all, those are the people we have always stood up for.

I for one have found purpose in the trenches, standing up for and championing the cause of the marginalized, first as a pastor of an inner-city church and then as a social work practitioner. I engaged in direct service in both roles. By 2012 my compassion was badly fatigued, and if there is such a thing as burnout, I was scorched. I badly missed the formal teaching role that ministry provided. Upon joining academia, I quickly learned that it involves teaching about how to reach vulnerable people and offering case studies from our own and others’ practice. However, as time passes, we move further and further away from fresh and innovative field experiences. Academia even requires community service as a tenure requirement, but the obligatory community service requirements don’t necessarily satisfy the soul. For the past couple of years leading up to the election, I had felt the tug to be back on the front lines of service. The Ivory Tower was indeed like a tower removed from the suffering of vulnerable people. It seems as if I had experienced some sort of compassion fatigue reversal, a sort of compassion atrophy (at least an atrophy in exercising that compassion). Five days a week, sometimes more, I went to my office. I taught classes and met with students. On weekends I took my family to our favorite restaurant. Ironically, it was those times dining out with my family and dropping \$65 on a single

meal that I realized how far from practice I had gotten. On our way out of the parking lot one Sunday afternoon, there was a man with a sign asking for food. Since I wanted to be a responsible caregiver, I did not give cash to panhandlers. But I could supply an emergency bag of goodies. So my family and I stocked up on several non-perishable items and stuffed the baggies. It was great for the guilt after having just dropped \$65.00 on single meal. Just roll down the window, hand off a baggie, and drive off full of both dinner and that good feeling of having made a difference. But, as time passed, we ran out of baggies, and life became busier each passing year. But one constant for our family was darkening the door to our favorite restaurant. Another constant was the panhandlers, always in that same spot by the restaurant. After the first time I drove by as if not to notice, it got a bit easier the next time. But I wondered what I was teaching my children.

Two weeks ago, we passed by the same place. Again, a gentleman was there with a sign. I couldn't drive by again. I handed my son some cash (the gentleman was on the passenger's side of the corner) and had him hand it off. If looks of sincerity are any indication of authenticity, this gentleman was in real need of help. His eyes met my eyes as he looked past my son and thanked me and indicated that the cash would help his family. As I drove from that spot and out of the parking lot, I wept. My teenage son and his younger brother were perplexed at my tears and I tried to explain that the tears were out of compassion for this man and conviction for what I had allowed myself to become: being too busy to carve out quality time with and for people like the gentleman we had just helped. No amount of policy change through a Trump presidency or any other administration could ever keep me from spending quality time with people like this gentleman. Perhaps the Trump administration necessitates that we all step up our efforts to spend time in volunteer and spontaneous practice opportunities in service to others. As policies are rolled back, we will see more people holding signs than perhaps we have ever seen. As for me, this educator must rearrange some things and become an "edu-actor" again, especially in Trump's new world.

Representing the Marginalized: Advocating (Social Justice)

Nothing can replace grassroots organizing and advocacy. Unless the data demonstrate clearly that social policy and federal laws have either a neutral or even detrimental impact on vulnerable populations, then we must be a people devoted to political advocacy. Grassroots organizing will indeed be an upward climb, as Kaufman (2003) alludes to but also provides hope:

The dominant set of ideas that rule our society encourage us to have a passive view of our place in the world and a pessimistic view of the possibilities for change. Once we break free from this dominant set of ideas, a whole new world of possibilities for changing the world opens up before us (p. 12).

After many months of journeying, as the above narrative details, I have found my way forward in advocacy, breaking free from the passivity and pessimism of which Kaufman noted. One tool I have used is social media, a boon for social advocacy during the Trump presidency; it gathers people from the four corners and joins them together. I discovered a well-organized, well researched, and up to date grassroots organizing network: National Association of Social

Workers (NASW). The days of do-it-yourself advocacy are over: search out your Representatives or Senators, get a mailing address, write a letter, apply a stamp, and drop it in the mail. If you know your zip code, you can connect to NASW's current advocacy objectives, and the political operatives for your area are pulled up for you. All you have to do is supply some basic information and then a form letter is submitted to your local politicians. NASW has facilitated this advocacy in my home state as I have contacted political operatives in the House and Senate. Additionally, NASW Tennessee has provided state practitioners and educators with weekly updates regarding the legislative agenda in Tennessee. NASW Tennessee also sponsored a day in which social workers gathered at the state capitol and learned about current policy initiatives and also met local and state politicians. Social workers from across the state of Tennessee learned about efforts to repeal The Affordable Care Act. In addition to the above efforts, Karen Franklin, Executive Director of NASW Tennessee, is interested in collaborating with other social work operatives as we move forward: "NASW Tennessee is open to exploring other opportunities for incorporating advocacy and policy in classroom and community learning experiences" (K. Franklin, personal communication, May 30, 2017). We are in the process of setting up a meeting presently to see how we can flush that out.

As for the time being, I have renewed energy and impetus for advocacy efforts. I will continue to learn all I can and make as much difference as I can as I continue to join forces with other social workers locally and nationally. Sometime in the next week I will sit down with what looks like a good book: *The Trump Survival Guide: Everything You Need to Know About Living Through What You Hoped Would Never Happen*. I think the title says a lot, but the book says a lot more. My first review of the book revealed a plethora of practical information, from organizations to join to different types of advocacy efforts ranging from the environment to women's reproductive issues. I will continue to read, watch the news, seek out the opinions of others different from me, and do what I can as I bond with others.

Engler & Engler (2016) remind us that the entire previous century illustrates the power of peaceful protest and the dividends of stepping up and joining the work of advocacy:

Decade after decade, unarmed mobilizations have created defining moments. In the United States, these include the sit-down strikes in Michigan auto plants of the 1930s, the antiwar and campus free-speech movements of the 1960s, the welfare and women's rights protests of the 1970s, the nuclear freeze campaign and AIDS activism of the 1980s, direct action to protect old-growth forests and oppose corporate globalization in the 1990s, and demonstrations against the Iraq War in the early years of the new century. Internationally, strategic nonviolent conflict has been critical in helping to overthrow undemocratic rulers in a litany of countries, from Chile and Poland, to the Philippines and Serbia, to Benin and Tunisia (Int. xvii).

Social workers have often been at the forefront of these reforms. Francis Perkins (Secretary of Labor under Franklin Roosevelt), and Harry Hopkins (instrumental in crafting the New Deal) are identified as social workers. Jane Addams influenced change through advocacy in a number areas: disease prevention, health clinics, housing codes, child labor laws, and industrial safety guidelines (Karger & Stoesz, 2014). Social workers have influenced change in a legion of ways

that have gone unheralded and have never made the history books. At this time, at this very hour, social workers must draw lines in the sands of time and once again be the champions of social justice.

Rehearsing a History of Hope: Reflecting (Integrity)

As of late May, as I am submitting this narrative account, impeachment talk escalates. Will 45 be impeached or will he survive the Russian probe? It seems that as time passes, and as I regain a sense of perspective, the prospect of a Trump impeachment is not as exciting as even a month ago, especially when I consider the political succession process. Why should I place any hope in a Trump impeachment? In my Generalist Social Work class, we spoke of this thing called “locus of control” (Singh, 2006). Clients are often out of sorts and disappointed in life because of misplaced notions of control. Clients, human beings like me, often hope for something to happen outside of themselves when they can control what happens inside themselves regardless of what happens environmentally. Social workers can actually de-empower clients if we are not crystal clear on locus of control. Being hyper-focused on what we cannot control quells empowerment. But locus of control is also about realizing that we do have power to impact our environment

I cannot in any meaningful way control whether there is a scandal of enough proportions to impeach Donald Trump. And my control is pretty much nil on how a Trump, Pence, or Ryan presidency lays out policy change. As for policy change, just hours before I submitted this narrative, President Trump withdrew from the Paris Climate Agreement. The collective world shook its head again. I cannot do much about that withdraw at this moment, but I can impact what I do. As I reflect on that, I can do a lot. And when I join other likeminded people, I can do amazing things. So I am incorporating my own pedagogy. These days I will hyper-focus on what I can control. Perhaps the greatest eureka moment is realizing I do not need Spender or the deep state or a scandal. I do not need a hero or a superhero. Superheroes are not really needed. I just need to be me and do what I do, and collaborate with others and oppose all policies which disadvantage people or planets.

Reframing and reflecting through writing this narrative has been good for my soul. We as social workers should reflect more often and reframe things from time to time. It adds perspective and can bolster our collective integrity. As we reflect together, perhaps Trump is not the worst thing that could have happened to progressive ideas. Maybe he, by default, will turn out to be one of the best things that could have happened. Maybe the Trump presidency will awaken a slumbering body of activists. Maybe now we will not leave it to the other person to take to social media, to march in the streets, to organize people at a grassroots level. I am the other. Whoever reads this narrative is the other. It is time we all quit waiting for heroes. We don't need heroes. We need me. We need you. We need us. We have a way to go and a long list of policy issues with which to consider: healthcare, welfare, living wages, jobs, housing, criminal justice, racial rights, immigration status, women's issues, education, the environment. We must act quickly and with creativity. After all, when snowflakes join, as I have learned literally and metaphorically, a lot changes happen.

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